



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

MELVIN W. CARTER III
Councilmember

September 3, 2008

Greetings,

I am extremely passionate about the protection of our country's First Amendment rights. It is because of that same passion that I've been engaged in this issue throughout the year. I found it imperative that our officers were prepared to skillfully engage in the delicate balance of protection for Saint Paul residents and RNC delegates/visitors, and preservation of our right to freedom of speech. As a result of that preparation, our city has provided access to protesters that is unprecedented.

As a delegate in Denver last week, we were so insulated from the protesters that most of us were completely oblivious to their existence – let alone their message. In Saint Paul, protesters are literally across the street from the Xcel Energy Center, where the convention is being held. Our drive for such unprecedented access was successful; over 12,000 protesters were able to peacefully demonstrate their dissent to the Republican National Convention and platform in its first two days.

Our commitment to protesters has not changed; we are committed to conducting the Convention in a way that welcomes, accepts, and maintains a safe environment for people who desire to peacefully express their point of view.

Unfortunately, there is a well-organized group of self-proclaimed "anarchists" who have come to Saint Paul with disruption of our city as their stated goal. To meet this goal, they have employed a variety of tactics, including:

- Infiltrating peaceful demonstrations among protesters with meaningful messages, inciting anger and violence against police and delegates;
- Breaking windows of storefronts and removing bricks from business facades in our downtown area;
- Damaging and destroying police cars;
- Slashing tires;
- Blockading our roads;
- Throwing rocks at delegate buses; and
- Throwing urine, bleach and feces at police officers and residents.

As officials whose primary job is to keep our city operating smoothly for *all* of our residents, businesses and visitors, we cannot accept such disruption--especially when it takes the form of criminal or violent behavior, as it has this week.

I am dismayed by the destruction and disruption that has occurred in our city this week. Specifically, I regret that this group of "anarchists" chose to employ tactics which created such serious chaos and disruption. Their actions produced no desirable results, lacked discipline, endangered everyone in the vicinity and, ironically, produced a major distraction from the important message of peace that was expressed so powerfully at the planned demonstrations.



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My office continues to field many calls and emails from individuals concerned that our public safety strategy violates protesters' right to free speech, because it holds everyone accountable for their actions. I couldn't disagree more. As a student of the teachings of Gandhi, Mandela and Dr. King, I have studied civil disobedience extensively (and even had occasion to engage in such, on a few occasions), and learned a number of important characteristics. Each of these individuals:

- Resorted to civil disobedience only after having tried everything else without results;
- Targeted their focus and disobedient behavior in a strategic way to shine a light on a specific law or situation they believed to be unjust;
- Engaged in well-planned demonstrations with trained, disciplined activists; and
- Understood and readily accepted the accountability for, and consequences of, their behavior.

As so many of this week's events (excluding the main, planned demonstrations) fail to meet any of the above criteria, it is difficult for me to categorize or protect such behavior as "free speech", "civil disobedience" or even "protest", but as a group of people who believed themselves to be above the law and found that they were not. Those who believe themselves to have been wrongfully treated by the police will have their day in court if they wish, and I have confidence in that process.

Moving forward, I am hopeful that those of us interested in protesting the RNC this week take a lesson from the past and conduct our demonstrations in accordance with the lessons learned about how to maximize their effectiveness at communicating a desired message.

Moreover, I call on all of our law enforcement partners to continue to:

- Work tirelessly to maintain safety and stability in our city this week by identifying, investigating and pursuing all credible threats of criminal and/or violent behavior, and
- Maintain a high evidentiary standard when requesting, approving and executing search warrants.

The thing that makes America great is that our government is built on the critical understanding that all voices – especially those who express dissent – must be heard in order to gain the best understanding of the issues we face. It is my hope that we can all express ourselves this week and at all times in ways that contribute to our collective understanding.

Sincerely in service,

Melvin W. Carter, III
Saint Paul City Councilmember – Ward One